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AUTHOR Dannerbeck, Francis J.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the University of South Carolina's self-paced FL program, which was designed to help overcome langr.ge program weaknesses relating chiefly to college textbooks. This program uses conventional college texts accompanied by special learning activities packets. Three self-paced programs, in Spanish, German, and French, are described, including learning activities, requirements, and testing and grading procedures, by way of providing a model for other possible self-paced programs. (AM)

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SELF-PACING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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Francis J. Dannerbeck
T. Bruce Fryer
Carl H. Johnson
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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INTRODUCTION

Self-pace at South Carolina was originally conceived in the Fall of 1971 as a Ph. D. project in Spanish Education by Dr. Peggy J. Hartley, who is now in Spanish at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C. The purpose of the dissertation project was to help overcome some of the usual weaknesses that plague basic language programs. These weaknesses relate to college textbooks and include:

1) the course syllabus which ordinarily specifies by which days lessons are to be covered, but rarely contains specifications for learning;
2) the absence of clearly stated unit and course objectives that students can readily understand;
3) a lack of clear directions and activities that might lead toward efficient realization of stated objectives;
4) a lack of testing procedures that are compatible with the stated objectives and learning activities;
5) inefficient uses of time such as rehashing the text or engaging in other work in the classroom that often confuses students and thus hampers learning, or that can be done more effectively at home, in the language laboratory, or elsewhere.

The idea then was to overcome some of these weaknesses with a self-paced program that consists of a conventional college textbook accompanied by special learning activities packets which are

designed to contribute toward maximum efficiency, economy, specificity, flexibility, and student interest in basic FL instruction.

Self-pace at South Carolina was intended not only to help overcome some of the above stated kinds of weaknesses, but also to allow the student with his conventional text and LAP's to exercise considerable freedom and responsibility for how he learns, to some extent what he learns, and for his success for learning. The spadework in Spanish paved the way for adaptation to French and German. The presentation of our three programs has been planned as a kind of model for others who may wish to self-pace.

Let us briefly zero in on our session objectives so that we might keep them in focus as we proceed with the three presentations:

I. The reader will be able to analyze the curricular variables in his school or college and then to make a decision as to whether prerequisites for a self-paced program exist. (i.e. administrative support, control of grading procedures, availability of material resources, etc.)

II. Provided that he has sufficient guidance in the form of individual help, in-service training, and the like, to facilitate planning and implementation, the reader will, given the conditions stated below, be able to do the following:

A. Given the guidelines for self-pacing, the reader will be able to adapt conventional materials to self-pacing.

B. Given examples of the unique features of the French, German, and Spanish programs at the University of South Carolina, the reader will be able to self-pace one or more of these languages, taking these

unique features into account.

SPANISH SELF-PACE

Self-pacing in Spanish is in its fourth year of operation at the University of South Carolina. During this time it has gone through numerous phases. Each phase has moved the program toward a more solidified state, having profited from earlier discoveries. Let me briefly outline the four phases since they represent stages that other programs may wish to build into the development of a similar program or they may represent intermediate stages that could be eliminated by adapters.

1971-72 Experimental Year

During this year 31 students participated in an experimental group and a comparable number in a control group study. For more information concerning this year, you are directed to Dr. Hartley's doctoral thesis, an article appearing in Hispania in the spring of 1975, or an article in FL Exchange (available with handouts). A conventional textbook with a good tape program and teacher's manual were supplemented by a set of performance objectives for each unit. This textbook, Español a lo vivo, by Terrence Hansen and Ernest Wilkins, has been used throughout the entire program and more recently in its revised edition. The control group met four times per week in a conventional lock-step program with the instructor. The experimental group met once per week. Special features for the experimental group were:

1) Students took tests only when ready.
2) Students were permitted to move ahead as quickly or as slowly as they completed units of work.
3) Students were required to make 85% or better on

quizzes rather than 70% in the lock step program.

4) Materials were not programmed, but were sufficient to permit students to work on their own toward the stated objectives.

1972-1973: Year of Expansion

During this year, the objectives were refined and printed in a booklet available for students (available through the ERIC system). Of approximately 600 students in the basic introductory course in Spanish, 280 students were in self-pacing and 320 were in large-group lock-step classes meeting four times per week or regular sections also meeting four times per week. At least four major changes were made for this year:

1) Whereas during the first year none of the students studying in self-pacing had previously studied Spanish, during the second year of operation, the program was opened to students who had previously studied Spanish. Criterion-referenced tests were administered at the beginning to students who wished to move ahead into more advanced units. In addition, students who had studied other languages (French majors) were encouraged to enroll.

2) Whereas in the first year of operation, students met once per week in a large group session for cultural presentations, during the second year the students met an additional time per week for conversation classes with a native speaker (7-10 students per class). Students tended to take exams on a more regular basis during this year since they got more feedback on their progress and on the progress of other students.

3) A third addition was a self-paced testing room. It was open from 9-4 daily and was staffed by an instructor and two

assistants. Students could seek assistance at any time concerning problems with the materials or content. All tests were secured in locked file cabinets and were administered in the room. Each unit consisted of a written exam and an oral comprehension exam. Many units contained speaking objectives. All were tested in this one room. Although space was very limited, two booths with cassette tape recorders complete with headphones were installed so that students could take the test without being interrupted.

4) A fourth change was the establishment of a year-round self-pace system so that students could be given real flexibility in time constraints. Many people completed 101 and 102 in the same semester. At the other extreme, students who did not complete the 101 course in one semester were given an Incomplete(I). That "I" could remain on their records for one full calendar year following its assignment. In other words, students receiving an "I" in December of one year were given until December of the following year to complete the course. This was an extreme that was to be corrected in future developments. The grading scale was maintained at 85% minimum.

1973-1974: Third Year

This third year of operation saw further developments in the Spanish self-pace program.

1) A section of 201 (third semester) was opened using a second level of the text used in 101-102. A total of approximately 250 students were enrolled in 101-102-201 in addition to people who were maintained in their Incomplete status.

2) Since French and German added programs in this third year of operation of the Spanish program, the department was able to

open three large resource centers, one for each language, where listening carrels were available for testing listening comprehension.

3) Students could practice their speaking and listening comprehension not only in a broadcast-type booth available before, but also in a cassette lab with 32 stations. This new lab permitted students to control their selection and programming of materials to a great degree.

4) During the spring semester, a fourth semester of Spanish (202) was made available to students interested in pursuing further their self-pace studies of Spanish. The students in 201-202 met in conversational gatherings or "tertulias" to discuss selected topics.

1974-1975: Fourth Year

Presently the Spanish self-pace program is in its fourth year of operation. It includes three semesters of instruction 101-102-201. An incoming student may place at any of the beginning points of the course, or if he selects to take a placement exam, he may begin a course at what is normally the mid-semester point. The materials used are the 3rd edition (1974) of Español a lo vivo, the workbooks to accompany the text, and a set of performance objectives revised to coincide with the new edition of the text. Additional speaking objectives were added to encourage communication skills.

The program is run by an instructor, Teresa Soufas, and four graduate assistants, all but one of whom are native speakers for the 101-102 courses. Another instructor and a native speaker are involved in 201.

It is interesting to note that on a cost factor analysis for instruction (usually the most important for administrators), this program is no more or less expensive than a program for an equivalent number of students in a regular course.

The material in each course is divided in the following fashion:

101S Units 1-8

102S Units 9-16

201S Units 17-24 (plus additional readings)

Some changes were made in the concept of pacing due to experience in previous years:

1) Students must complete at least the first two units of any course they enroll in during the first six weeks of class in any semester in order not to receive an NC (No Credit). NOTE: The University of South Carolina is presently on a grading system of A, B, C, NC with no D or F.

2) By the end of the semester all students must have completed at least half of the units in a course and the culture project in order not to receive an NC. A person who completes more tests than the minimum and who completes the culture project will receive an I (Incomplete).

3) In order to register for the next course in a sequence, students must complete the culture projects and 6 of the 8 units in any course. In the following semester, these students not meeting the minimal requirements are permitted to take tests in sequence but must wait until another semester to register for the next course.

Letter grades are based on the following standards:

The final grade for the semester is based 90% on the quiz

scores for each unit and 10% for the work on culture.

Students must pass the test for any given unit with a grade of 85% or better before going on to the next test. Any score of 85% is recorded on the student's grade sheet. However, if they again make a score below 85% on a make-up test, they must begin at the beginning unit of the prior semester or mid-term sequence.

The self-pace office is open from 9-3 P.M. Monday through Friday. A student is required to attend one session per week on culture. He may select a conversation class with a native speaker dealing with a specific unit he may be working on, or he may come by the office for tutorial help with the native speakers who are available throughout the day.

Students may choose to move from the self-pacing track to the regular track at the end of a semester, or they may move into the self-pacing track from the regular track. The objectives of both courses are essentially the same, so that this is possible. This permits students who are having severe problems with the regular pace of instruction to move into a program where they may be able to function more profitably. It also permits students who wish to major or minor (cognate) in Spanish to move ahead at a more rapid pace, making them eligible for upper division courses before they would normally be so. Many students take advantage of this opportunity. Self-pace, as visualized in Spanish at least, is for more than just the accelerated student.

GERMAN SELF-PACE

The German Self-pace program is the smallest of the three, reflecting a smaller enrollment in German than in French and Spanish. We have had about 50 students involved in self-pace

each semester, out of a total of about 200 who sign up for the basic German 101 or 102 courses. Students are encouraged to enroll in self-pace only if they have had previous learning experience in some FL, preferably German. In German we started with a program that permitted the student to complete as much as two semesters work im one semester, or as little as one course in two semesters. During the past year we found, however, that few students who opted for the one course in two semesters actually completed the program. Therefore, we have madecertain changes that require the individual to meet rather specific deadlines. He is required to finish one course by the end of one semester but he may move as fast as he wishes and complete up to two courses in one semester. This semester our fastest students, three people, completed German 101 by November 1, which is the eighth week of a fourteen week semester. Of the other students, all of whom must complete at least one course by the end of the current semester, many will do more and will continue next term until they have completed the two-semester sequence.

Our German program is built around the text Anfang und Fortschritt-An Introduction to German, MacMillan, 1973. Each unit consists of a learning activities packet, cassette tapes, and post tests. Units 1-12 constitute the 101 course and 13-22, the 102 course. The suggested approach to each unit is as follows:

1) The student reads the learning objectives and completes the suggested activities.

2) He goes to the language laboratory to get reinforcement

on tape for what he has studied.

3) He attends one or two oral sessions for the unit (one is required).

4) He takes a unit self-test.

5) He takes a unit test for a grade.

As the student proceeds through the unit he may go to a master helper in the German self-pace room which is open twelve hours weekly. The student may visit the master helper as often as he wishes. He takes a unit self-test when he feels he has satisfactorily completed the work of the unit. Then he goes to the master helper to discuss his self-test performance. Next, a unit test is administered either by the master helper or in a classroom on the day specified for group testing on the course schedule, if the student is ahead of the prescribed course schedule sheet. The test is marked satisfactory or unsatisfactory. If the grade was S the student may proceed with the next unit. If the grade was U the master helper prescribes appropriate work. In this case, the student must return for an additional supplementary check-up before moving to the next unit.

After the first two weeks of each semester, during which attendance at all oral sessions (a total of four) is mandatory, the student is required to attend at least one oral session per unit for which he receives an oral grade. He is encouraged to attend more than one oral session per unit but is graded for only one. He comes to the oral session for which he is to be graded with a prepared oral statement of five or six lines which incorporate structures,,vocabulary, and content of the given unit. He is also prepared to ask and answer questions in class

and to participate in general oral activities. For the total performance he receives the grade of 5 (highest), 3, 1, or 0. The total of these grades makes up 20% of the course grade.

Students who follow the course schedule sheet and do not work ahead of it regularly attend scheduled oral sessions for specific units; those who move more rapidly and at their individual paces come to individual or small group oral sessions conducted by an oral instructor.

Two 75-minute oral sessions are scheduled weekly. Others are set up by appointment. For the total of about 50 people in German self-pace each semester, we have two oral instructors and two part-time master helpers.

When students reach mid-term and final course points, they take the following tests:

1) an oral interview administered by appointment with an oral instructor. It consists of a prepared oral statement of about 8-10 lines and 25 oral questions. (100 points, 10% of course grade, times 2 for mid-term and final grade equals 20% of course grade).

2) reading and writing taken by fast students in the self-pace room and by others in the classroom. (100 points, 20% of course grade, times 2 for mid-term and final equals 40% of course grade).

3) listening and dictation administered like the R-W tests. (100 points, 10% times two equals 20% of course grade).

While many students prefer to take exams when they are listed on the course schedule sheet, others who are ahead of the suggested schedule may take exam components in any order that they wish.

The components may be taken in one test battery or they may be distributed over a period of several days. There is an A and a B form for each component. Each part is graded immediately after administration. If the student is not satisfied with the result, he may take the alternate form after a diagnosis of the first test result and subsequent study. The grading scale for the mid-term and final exam components is as follows: 100-92: A; 91-85: B; 84-78: C; below 78: NC (No Credit).

Following are a few features of German self-pace that might be of particular interest:

1) Recycling: Some students in a regular basic FL course get behind for any number of reasons that prevent them from staying with the day to day syllabus. In German self-pace these people are recycled. That is, they start over in self-pace and are usually able to pick up the pieces they missed and continue progressing at their own rate. Additionally, people who have had previous experience in the language, whether in high school several years ago or elsewhere, and who then try an intermediate course and find that it is too advanced, may be recycled into self-pace 101 Or 102. Oftentimes, these individuals can catch up within a few weeks while at the same time remaining in the same course.

2) Grading: The grade of No Credit has been virtually eliminated in German self-pace, and the performance of self-pace students compares favorably with German regular students. It is in many cases superior because self-pacers have more opportunities for individual help, more clearly specified learning objectives and activities, tests that are compatible with course objectives and activities, A and B test forms that facilitate success by

providing a second chance if it is needed, and a grading system that encourages positive performance.

3) Enthusiasm: We have found that many self-pacers become particularly enthusiastic about German because of the flexibility designed into the program that encourages mastery, a feeling of success, and a desire to continue. Many sefl-pacers sign up for intermediate German even though it is not required.

4) Culture: While we do not have special culture sessions as the French and Spanish programs do, we integrate culture into our day to day instruction.

Finally, it is important to note that self-pace is not for all students and some self-pacers are recycled into German regular. Students are advised not to enroll in self-pace if they feel they need a tight course syllabus, and who might otherwise not be taking German.

While no intermediate German self-pace course is currently available, it is expected that one will be in the near future.

FRENCH SELF-PACE

French self-pace, like German, is in its second year of operation at the University of South Carolina and has enjoyed considerable success. At its origin, self-pace was intended equally for those students wishing to complete the basic French course (101-102) in less than conventional time, and those who by advising and counseling or as a result of previous less than successful experience in language felt they would need more than the conventional time to complete course requirements. Of the more than 500 students who have passed through the self-pace program in French, however, only a small number have been

identified as needing or wanting to be a part of the "slow-paced student" category, an indication of which is that very few of the students who have received the grade of Incomplete have gone on to complete the course. This has caused us to tighten our admission to self-pace through careful counseling to those students with some previous training in French or another language, who will do more than a semester's work in one semester, those who complete the course requirements early and wait for the next term to begin the course logically following, and those who for reasons of improper placement at a higher course level wish and need to salvage credit for their language course during the semester, instead of dropping out completely during the semester and receiving a failing grade. Those individual students who can be identified as motivated students having problems maintaining a conventional pace are not ignored. They are rather handled on a one-to-one basis and a decision is made either to shift them to a regular class or to make provision for special supplementary help within the self-pace track.

The French program presently uses Parole et Pensée by Yvone Lenard as the basic text. For each lesson, the student receives a packet of objectives and study hints to prepare him for class-work and the examinations. Each packet also contains supplementary exercises and hand-drawn sketches to aid in the student's acquisition of new concrete vocabulary items and those abstractions which lend themselves to drawing. The student attends class two days per week (75 minutes each), during the first of which he is presented with clarification and explanation of grammatical material, communicative oral activities based on the particular

lesson, cultural material in the form of slide/film/tape presentations or discussion of culture with opportunities for reaction and interaction. The second of these two meetings is handled in one of two ways, depending on staffing capabilities at the particular hour: 1) the first half of the period is spent on (a) previous lesson(s) for those students who need more work on that material, and the second half is spent on new material for which certain students are ready; 2) the class is separated into two parts (two classrooms), one instructor treating previously handled material, the other new material for those who are ready. The attendance of each student is carefully monitored so as to insure that he has classroom time and oral work on every lesson covered during the semester. This requirement may be met fairly early in the semester by the fast-paced student and may be waived under one circumstance only; if the student prepares material completely on his own and he is tested on that material before the opportunity to work on the lesson in class occurs, he is forgiven that classtime. This policy puts special importance and pressure on the testing arrangements and the language laboratory.

As with Spanish and German, the testing center serves several useful purposes. It is open approximately 25 hours per week for testing and, equally as important, for extra help and counseling. Since the objectives of the basic course stipulate considerable oral proficiency, the unit tests, mid-term and final examinations involve somewhat lengthy oral examinations. Each examination involves dictation (on cassette) and an extensive oral interview which usually consists of a communicative exchange involving structures and vocabulary of the specified unit, reading aloud

for pronunciation, structured and spontaneous discussion of a short sight passage and similar structured and spontaneous discussion of an oral passage spoken by the evaluator. All self-pace instructors and assistants are on duty several hours per week for help and testing. This guarantees more personal contact between the students and their assigned teachers if they seek it, and more freedom if that is what they desire. All instructors and assistants give oral and written tests in an attempt to humanize rather than mechanize testing. The grading scale in French is: 93-100: A; 86-92: B; 80-85: C. Each test may be repeated once for grade improvement and must be repeated if the student scores below 80. Alternate tests are available for every lesson.

In self-pace the work of the laboratory assumes an even greater role perhaps than it does in a conventional course. For this reason the student has two tapes available to him for each lesson. The first is the tape which accompanies the textbook and for which the student has a lab workbook and may complete specified exercises to be graded by his instructor. The second tape, designated Help Tape for Lesson 1, 2, etc. reexplains the major grammar points of each lesson in English, does specific exercises on major structures and spends time on pronunciation and meanings of new vocabulary. This tape serves both the slower paced student needing another "go-around" on a particular lesson, as well as the faster paced student wanting to complete requirements considerably earlier than other students. These latter "help tapes" are available for duplication to students who bring their own cassettes or reels to the Department's tape reproduction facilities. Many students have availed themselves of

this service.

The cultural presentations in this basic self-pace courses involve our own departmental resources, both physical and human, as well as outside commercial materials, the most important of which is a publication of Dr. J. Dale Miller, originally entitled 100 French Culture Capsules, and more recently available as USA-France Culture Capsules from the Culture Contrasts Company of Salt Lake City, Utah. These contrasts have served as the core of our cultural work and a list of the topics integrated into our basic courses may be found in the packets available from U.S.C. on request.

In order to insure that students make progress toward course completion, French has maintained deadlines by which a student must have completed certain work. The first unit test must be completed by the end of the fourth week of the semester. A student not meeting this requirement is counseled individually and is frequently placed immediately into the conventional basic course which uses materials and objectives identical to those of self-paced courses. This placement is totally dependent upon the student's progress and interest. If he has already found a need for more structure and can enter the regular class without its being too difficult, this is done. Otherwise, special supplementary sessions are worked out to get him to the pace where he needs to be. The mid-term examination must be completed no later than the tenth week of the semester, and all work but the final examination must be completed before final examination week. Only those students completing all but the final examination may be given the grade of Incomplete.

A student who completes all work but the final examination and who wishes to register for the next course is obliged to complete the final examination before six weeks into the new semester. A student who wishes to wait a semester between the two basic courses has that one complete semester to finish the final exam.

Although an individualization process by its own definition implies the necessity of dealing with several factors, our working with the when and how have better helped us to justify to our students and to ourselves the what and why of learning a language.